

# Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Winter 2023  
VOLUME 8 • ISSUE 4

## God is ON Mission



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THIS YEAR'S THEME:  
**THE WHOLE CHURCH  
ON MISSION**

■ God Is on Mission

 **VMissions**

# From the President

## Doxological Mission

BY AARON M. KAUFFMAN

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

—Habakkuk 2:14



God's mission is first and foremost doxological. It's about the pursuit of God's glory. Yes, it includes us, but it is not primarily about our needs, ambitions or hopes. God's burning desire is for all of creation to know God's glory—his awesome and utterly unique presence—and to give him the praise he deserves so that we might enjoy him together forever.

This is not because God is selfish. God does not demand our worship to fill some unmet need. God knows that we exist only because he in his infinite power and wisdom brought us into being. It is only when we know God and know ourselves in relation to God that we can truly flourish the way God always intended. Like newborn children to their awestruck parents, we are precious to him. God desires loving communion with those made in his image.

That's what makes idolatry so tragic. When we exchange "the glory of the immortal God for images" (Rom. 1:23)—whether of ourselves or anything else that is merely part of God's creation—we aim our hearts at something lower than the one who made us. Since ultimately we become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8), worshiping anything but the living God results in the debasement of our very selves. And the results are disastrous for us and the rest of creation.

Without God in his rightful place as the cornerstone of our lives, the whole tower collapses into pieces. As C. S. Lewis once wrote, "Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth 'thrown in': aim at Earth and you will get neither."

Thankfully, God did not wait for us to turn our hearts to him, but revealed his glory to us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

In other words, God takes the first step in mission by reaching out to us in Jesus. It's our job to respond with repentance, obedience and praise. We do that at VM Missions by inviting people to encounter the living God through prayer, worship gatherings, Bible studies, spiritual friendships and more. In such encounters, we are "transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). One day God's glory will be known the world over through the transformed lives of his people.

Mission is about God's desire to redeem all things in heaven and on earth through the personal knowledge of his glorious presence. Our first step in joining God's mission is on our knees in worship.



THE WHOLE CHURCH  
ON MISSION

Exploring how our generous God is leading an obedient church into mission, how every member is invited into deeper participation, and how we can live out God's kingdom holistically.

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## Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/22 to 12/31/22

Special Projects \$587,947	Special Projects \$511,654
Mission Fund \$336,799	Mission Fund \$280,653
<b>Income</b> Total \$924,746	<b>Expenses</b> Total \$792,307

**Mission Fund:** undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries.

## Transforming

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## Join Putt Fore Missions on Saturday, May 20

Mini-golfers of all ages can join in friendly competition in teams of four on May 20, from 9 am to 1 pm. Enjoy food and fellowship in this family-friendly fundraiser. Event proceeds will support the ministries of VM-Missions. Learn more and register at [vmmissions.org/putt-fore-missions](http://vmmissions.org/putt-fore-missions)



## Gear Up for Motorcycle For Missions, June 2-3

Hop on and ride in the 11th annual Motorcycle for Missions. Cruise the highways and byways of Virginia and enjoy the beautiful Shenandoah Valley scenery while supporting the ministries of VM-Missions! Join for both day rides or just one day. Learn more and register at [vmmissions.org/motorcycle-for-missions](http://vmmissions.org/motorcycle-for-missions)

## Five Mission Workers Recently Appointed

VM-Missions appointed the following workers since Fall 2022. All assignments below are based in Harrisonburg, Va., except as indicated.



**Vicki Barnes** is a tranSend intern in college ministry at Eastern Mennonite University, in partnership with Every Nation Campus.



**C. Farah Grace** is a Marketplace Worker in a role that opens doors among the local Muslim community.



**Rissa Martin** is a tranSend intern serving as the Volunteer Coordinator at Agape Home, an orphanage in Chiang Mai, Thailand.



**Baker Rigg** is serving as the part-time chaplain of the Rockingham Harrisonburg Regional Jail.



**Hannah Shultz** shares Jesus and disciples children and families, in partnership with two Spanish-speaking churches.

VM-Missions also recently reappointed the following workers:

- **Alfonso Alvarado**, church planter and pastor at Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah, Lacey Spring, Va.,
- **Mike and Risha Metzler family**, church planters of Mosaic of Grace Church, Harrisonburg, Va.,
- **Armando and Veronica Sanchez**, church planters and pastors of Iglesia Shalom, Waynesboro, Va.

## David Gingerich Named Director of Partner Development



David Gingerich has assumed a new leadership role as Director of Partner Development, focusing on fundraising, donor cultivation and church relations. He was formerly the Church Relations Associate and was responsible for planning VM-Missions events. He is passionate about joining the church in sending God's people to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to nurture and grow relationships with our community of partners," David writes.

## Abe Hartzler, Director of Advancement, Resigns



Abe Hartzler, Director of Advancement for VM-Missions, resigned in late February. He will begin working as a data specialist with the

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, based in Verona, Va. Abe joined the VM-Missions staff in July 2019 as Ministry Support Coach and the Events and Publicity Coordinator. Sensing a desire to engage the supporters and friends of VM-Missions in new ways and cultivate relationships with donors, Abe was named Director of Advancement in June 2020.

Abe writes, "I want to thank VM-Missions for investing in me, both as a leader, and as a disciple of Christ. It has been a joy to work with a team that cares so deeply both for the work of sharing the gospel, and for one another."

# God's Mission Has a Church

**The current culture shift is an opportunity to allow God to reshape and re-form us to become the missionary church that God intends.**

BY HOWARD MILLER



As our world is racked by an extraordinary cultural shift, the church finds itself in a state of deep disorientation. Unfortunately, the church's response has often been fight or flight. This is not the narrow road to which we are called. Our disorientation, as well as the rapid culture shift itself, demand that the church find a faithful way forward.

What is that way? I believe we will find it by firmly embracing God's kingdom reign and pairing it with a robust understanding of God's missionary character.

We must begin, in fact, by embracing that God is, by his very nature, a missionary God. This means that mission is an essential attribute of God: our Father pursues us, offering restored relationship and reconciliation with his creation, across all barriers and brokenness. Most of us never consider the truth of this! The biblical record points us toward this picture of God's nature. In Genesis, the Lord made the world because he is a missionary God! Although he is sufficient in himself, God chose to create a world inhabited by people so that he might relate to beings outside of himself. When sin entered the world, God promised to redeem and renew all of creation.

This missionary God called Abraham and promised that his heirs would be a blessing to the world, and then sent Abraham to a promised land. In Exodus God brought deliverance to Israel, commissioning them to live as God's culturally-contrasting people. Through the prophets God continually gave witness to the coming light which would be for all people.

In the New Testament, Matthew announced a Savior who had Gentile women in his family tree, was worshiped by foreign scholars, declared that this "gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14), and concluded by giving a worldwide commission to go into all the world.

The purpose for the church radically changes when we begin naming that God is a missionary God. Jesus is the embodiment of God's mission, and in John's Gospel Jesus identifies himself as being "sent" forty-nine separate times. Then, near the end of the Gospel of John, He says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). With this view we come to understand that it's not that the church has a mission, but rather that God's mission has a church.

The impact of this truth is profound for the identity and nature of the church. The church of this missionary God must therefore be a missionary church. This church gathers for worship and then is sent into the world to live as Christ lived. It is Jesus' incarnation that models the way of God's kingdom, which is to be emulated by the church.

**The purpose for the church radically changes when we begin naming that God is a missionary God.**

Jesus began his earthly ministry by proclaiming "the kingdom is at hand, repent and believe..." (Mark 1:15). Jesus then went out and began to teach, heal, and deliver from demonic oppression, demonstrating the way of the kingdom.

Jesus demonstrated the will of the Father by renouncing worldly power, replacing it with





presence and servanthood. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God revealed himself as the one who is with and for his creation. Now, as the risen Lord sends his Spirit to empower the church, we are called to become God's people present in the world, with and for the world.

Our church history is shaped by the legacy of Christendom: the church aligning with political power to protect and maintain our position in society. This is vastly different from understanding the church being shaped as a missionary church whose calling is to be embedded as "sent ones" in our own societies. The current crisis presented by culture shift is an opportunity to allow God to reshape and re-form us to become the missionary church that God intends.

As a pastor, I seek to model this way of discipleship for God's people. First, I pray for my own identity shift, that I would be formed as a missionary right where I am. Included in this prayer is that I be sent to those who are spiritually hungry. God has answered this prayer by sending first one and then many persons with addictions, hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

Second, I have crafted a purpose statement for my life: "I am a living commitment to engage a deeply divided world through spiritual friendship." To be a spiritual friend leads me to be present, to listen, and to believe that God's Spirit is speaking and drawing persons in ways that I am unable to see. In faith I ask God to show me how the Spirit is at work in a person's life.

Third, I live daily with a profound sense that I represent God's people who are called to be a *sign* (God is at work, redeeming the world), a *foretaste* (the kingdom reign has begun), and an *instrument* (living the way of redemption), of the reign of God.

We follow Christ, the sent one, into God's own vocation. May we, as the church of our missionary God, learn to follow his invitation of "sent-ness" so that we can sincerely proclaim as Christ proclaimed, "the kingdom is at hand, repent and believe the good news."

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Howard Miller is Pastor of Huntington Mennonite Church in Newport News, Va.

# God's Heart Is for Reconciliation

Rachel draws people closer to Christ through organizing and leading worship for JMU college ministry gatherings.

BY RACHEL JANNEY



**D**o we truly believe that God is the primary agent of mission? If I'm being transparent, I don't think that I actually believed this until I was invited to reflect on it for this article.

We can't fully believe in something unless we have some sort of an understanding of what we're attempting to believe.

As a graduate student, I've learned that simple definitions best help me with understanding difficult (or even easy) statements. An agent can be defined as a person who acts on behalf of another person or group. To be primary is to simply be first in rank. To believe that "God is the primary agent of mission" is to believe that God is the ultimate actor in advancing his kingdom here on earth.

When I begin to ponder the sovereignty of God, I realize that God doesn't really need me or any of us. That statement must be hard for any of us who struggle with pride. However, God leading this mission helps me acknowledge that he doesn't need us to accomplish his plans, but rather, God invites us to partner with him. Personally, this demolishes any ounce of pride in my heart that tries to make disciples without Christ's partnership. This also allows me to rest in the fact that I don't have to be in control.

The mission of God is to call *all* people back to himself, through the saving grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Every single person on this earth needs Jesus so that we can be reconciled to the Father and take our rightful place as his adopted sons and daughters. God wants everyone to be saved and

to understand the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). The heartbeat of his mission is stated in Matthew 28:19-20 when Jesus says to his disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (NIV).

When I read through the Bible, I see that God's heart has always been for his people to be reconciled with him. Throughout the Old Testament, we read stories about how God is constantly calling humanity back to himself. Psalms 53 is a solid example of God's loyal pursuit. Another example is the Lord's covenant promise to David in 1 Chronicles 17, which promises us that Jesus is the Son of David and that his kingdom will last forever.

The truth is that God has been faithful to his people. God radically loves us with a love that is eternal (Jeremiah 31:3). Better yet, the whole Bible points to the one who will reconcile us with God forever. Our lives have been forever changed by this reconciliation, which everyone deserves to know about.

God's mission has helped me understand that I no longer live for myself. Growing up, I was never taught that God's heart was for all people to be saved. I was only focused on my own life and making sure I didn't end up in hell. But God radically changed my heart for God's people when I got to college. I now understand that I live to enhance the kingdom of God here on earth.

I was reminded that God's mission is bigger than mine when God called me to stay in Harrisonburg







Rachel Janney (third from right) with worship team members at Divine Unity Community Church, Harrisonburg, Va. In her tranSend assignment, she organizes and leads worship for college ministry gatherings at James Madison University, also in Harrisonburg, Va., (pictured below).

Photos courtesy of Rachel Janney



after college to do ministry. I knew that God had been calling me to vocational ministry since I was saved in 2017. However, I continually ran away from God's call to ministry and missions simply because I didn't want to live a life that didn't immediately benefit me.

As I grew in my walk with the Lord, Christ called me to repent from approaching my life and my decisions from this perspective. A question that I now reflect on when I'm making big decisions is, "Which option will allow me to make the most disciples?" God's mission should always be greater than our personal mission.

God's mission will forever be my mission, and should forever be our mission—to partner with God in advancing his kingdom here on earth. As we continue to pursue missions in our various vocations, I encourage you to let God lead your pursuit. It's my prayer that as God's people, we would never lose sight of this. May we feel comforted, supported, and encouraged by the leadership of our Lord.

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*In partnership with Every Nation Campus, Rachel Janney serves as a worship leader for college ministry gatherings at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.*



# God's Mission Is Bigger Than Mine

A pastor and church planter describes the joy of sharing the ministry of reconciliation with neighbors in Winston-Salem, N.C.

BY JUAN JOSÉ LAGOS



God is the main agent of mission.

What does it mean to believe this? It means a lot. Understanding this truth, with help from the Holy Spirit's revelation, brings rest to all of us who are working toward God's mission.

It allows us to trust that God will fulfill his promise to be with us while we carry out the Great Commission. It brings peace to our lives because it places us in the mission rather than over it, understanding that its main agent is the Holy Spirit who reveals, teaches, and directs us in the task, taking the lead and showing us how to be ambassadors of Christ in the world.

This reality, of God leading our mission, is a theme throughout the story of the Bible. After Adam and Eve sinned, God announced his plan for redemption, prophesying that from the seed of the woman would come the one who would crush the head of Satan. For this, he preserved humanity through Noah, then he raised Abraham to ratify the prophecy that from his seed would come the Savior and Liberator of the world, Jesus Christ.

And Christ, who took away the authority of the spirit of death with his own death and resurrection, is now the head of the church he sent to announce the message of the kingdom of God until he returns for us.

God's mission is bigger than mine. That allows me to join his story and his mission rather than carrying the burden of accomplishing it all on my own strength. This is how we must see ourselves as we follow the call of God our Father who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ. He has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation, sending us as ambassadors of Christ. But it is Christ who leads us in that very ministry.

Since the Lord did it first through us, we are given a joy to share rather than a burden to carry. That joy goes with us as we in turn call others to repentance so that they too may be reconciled with the Father through Christ. That is why we understand that God's mission is not only bigger than ours, but that it is ours. We are participating as instruments of God to carry out his own mission for the salvation of all.

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*Juan José and his wife Cecilia are church planters and pastors of Iglesia Cristiana Renuevo in Winston-Salem, N.C., partnering with the Tennessee/Carolina/Kentucky District of Virginia Mennonite Conference.*

## A Multiplying Movement

"Since the Lord first reconciled us to himself, he has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. We are given a joy to share rather than a burden to carry. That joy goes with us as we in turn call others to repentance, so that they too may be reconciled to God."

—JUAN JOSÉ LAGOS







The gospel is little known in this former Soviet nation in Central Asia, where Islam has been rooted for more than a thousand years. A VMissions team is sharing the message of Jesus with unreached people there through business engagement. Photos courtesy of David and Marta.

# God Helps Us Speak the Message

A family serving in Central Asia reflects on God's assurances.

BY DAVID AND MARTA (NAMES CHANGED)

**T**he Lord is fully committed and willing to help us in the plan that he himself has designed and has given us the privilege to join in. Especially in the early period of a new season or setting of ministry, it's easy to feel inadequate and ill-equipped for the work we felt called into.

Being so incapable and imperfect sometimes makes us doubt ourselves. Our high expectations for ourselves can even lead us to make excuses for not doing the task he commanded us, or wonder if we will really be able to carry out this magnificent calling of announcing his message in places where it is little known.

Exodus 4:10-12 makes great sense in these times of doubt. It encourages us and helps us to understand that it is not by our abilities that God chooses us, but by his own grace: "Moses said to the Lord, 'Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.' The Lord said to him, 'Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say'" (NIV).

Receiving the call to go to another place implies many changes and a lot of learning in unfamiliar areas, such as language, culture, and food. All of this can become overwhelming, and make us feel awkward like Moses did as he doubted his own ability to speak the message he was given.



A view from the apartment where the VMissions family lives.

But as we read these verses we can be filled with encouragement and hope knowing that the Lord will be with us. The question "Is it not I, the Lord?" leaves us without any argument or excuse to offer the Lord, and it frees us from the need to argue or make excuses in the first place.

"Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." Those are the words that make us persevere and remain faithful to the call that the Lord has given us.

*David and Marta and their children Pedro and Emilia (names changed) serve as interns in Central Asia.*

# Call to Prayer: Joining God's Heart for Mission

Prayer is a fundamental underpinning of how we partner with God to engage in our small part of the great gospel task.

BY JON TROTTER

**T**he gospel is for everyone. This tagline from the VMissions Church of Many Cultures campaign is not just a slogan but a bold statement of belief and action. God is a God of mission from the beginning of history and throughout the entire biblical story. God deeply desires his creation to be reconciled and made new through a true relationship with him, incarnated and made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. God also gives the church the responsibility to make disciples who are agents of reconciliation, and to multiply communities of Jesus-followers to every people group in the world.

The nearly 80 students currently participating in the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course in Harrisonburg, Va., are learning about God's heart for mission and the mandate that all believers have been given to go and make disciples of all peoples. With that clarity, a number of students have shared how they feel convicted to live in their circles in an open-handed way, eager to use the opportunities God gives them to be a representative of Jesus in every context.

In one class, students learned that God's heart is for the whole creation to worship the Creator. But how can people do that if they don't know their Creator? Paul says this best in Romans 10:14: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (NIV).

The purpose that all followers of Jesus are given is to bear witness to the love of God and invite all people into the family of God. We are all given authority and instruction to do this because of God's great love for us. Some are called to be sent out as vanguards of the good news around the world.



At the orientation for the Perspectives course, a panel answered questions about their journeys in mission from Jenny Fox (left). To her right is Clair Good, Lizzette Hernandez, and Blake Wood.

Photo: Jon Trotter

Others are called to pray and support those sent far and wide. Many VMissions workers are supported by a Ministry Support Team, which helps the worker share stories and raise ministry funds, but the most essential thing they do is join together in prayer to cover every aspect of the ministry and attune their perspectives to that of God's heart.

As we engage in our small part of the great gospel task, we partner with God's heart and we join in God's movement. Prayer is a fundamental underpinning of how we do that. As followers of Jesus pray together, the Holy Spirit enables us to see the big picture, the grand reality of God's plan for the restoration for humanity as shown in Revelation 7:9, and to see the immediate needs of the people right in front of us.

Join us in praying that the church—all of us—will bear witness to the in-breaking kingdom in every sphere of life, as we envision a Spirit-filled church of many cultures worshipping the Lord, now and forever.

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*Jon Trotter is the Communications Associate for VMissions.*



# Worker Profile:

## Jhustin Thompson

**Service program:** tranSend

**Serving since:** 2022

### Assignment:

I serve in a college ministry assignment with Every Nation Campus (ENC) and VMissions, and am sent by my congregation, Divine Unity Community Church (DUCC), Harrisonburg, Va. My work and goal is to show the love of God and be a light to campus. I want to see lives changed by the good news and do the work of God. Many students today don't have faith, so this is an opportunity to give hope and show that there is someone to put their faith in. My pastor, Chris Johnson, says, "We need to be the work before we do the work." I am changed by God and, in turn, I share the word and disciple people who will hopefully change and disciple others.

The way I do this is by organizing events and meeting with groups of students. There is a large group gathering at James Madison University each Thursday, and small groups at JMU and Bridgewater College where we dive into scripture, make observations, and ask questions from the text. Many times we ask God to lead us in what we do and talk about.

Another aspect of my ministry is being in charge of men's events where we do fun stuff and lower the barrier to faith conversations. I coordinate teams and tournaments with sports like basketball, and plan recreation activities that connect students to ENC and DUCC. We have a "no meeting without eating" rule!

### Biggest challenge:

For me, the challenge has been fundraising, known as Ministry Partner Development. I see it as like dying to my flesh. It's God's job to help people see the value of supporting my ministry. My salary is from people who saw the vision God has for my life and support that. It's a beautiful thing, but it doesn't make the "ask" any less awkward.

The whole objective of this internship is to discern if this is what God is calling me to do. I have to sink in and trust God to provide for me. My assignment is part-time, and I have another job to help with expenses.

### Biggest joy:

I love interacting with students and seeing their lives change. I love inviting people to experience life at DUCC and how they love being around our church. People are accepted there and witness the invitation into something deeper. I



Courtesy photo

am always doing ministry stuff, inviting people to go out and do fun activities. Everyone is different, so I join people where they are in their comfort level with church and conversations about faith.

A lot of people grew up in church but weren't empowered to do anything. We are big on discipleship. We want to equip people to be leaders to serve and make disciples. My joy is in seeing how much they learn and enjoy it, and how we invite them to join in our life together.

### A typical week:

After morning devotional time, I go to DUCC and join with others serving in college ministry at a "tactical" meeting where we talk about events or special things we can do to engage students. We go around and pray out for everyone's needs.

Then I head out to campus; I am usually at Bridgewater College. I talk one on one with students a lot of times. Many times they come to me if they have issues they want to talk about. I meet a lot of new people, and look for opportunities for God to open doors. I have small group twice a week on weekdays or weekends.

At the large gathering at JMU every Thursday at 7:00, it's like a church service: someone welcomes people, we play creative games as icebreakers. There are announcements, worship, prayer, and then a sermon followed by a time of discussion. Then we enjoy fellowship. It's held in a place that students can easily walk to and we always invite them to invite their friends.





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## JOIN US ON APRIL 19

**VMMissions is joining the Great Community Give!**

This is a sunrise to sunset giving day event that promotes charitable giving directly to nonprofits in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. Save the date for Wednesday, April 19, from 6:30am to 8:00pm.

Great Community Give is an initiative of The Community Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County.



#GREATCOMMUNITYGIVE



**April 19, 2023**

[vmmissions.org/great-community-give/](http://vmmissions.org/great-community-give/)

